

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
House of Representatives of the United States  
2426 Rayburn Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Conyers:

In the spirit of contributing to the Democratic Hearing of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives in its efforts to document the nature and extent of domestic spying programs, including its current and historical manifestations in Puerto Rico, the Civil Rights Commission of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico wishes to share relevant findings from our reports on the intervention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) against political and social movements in Puerto Rico.

Unfortunately, the events that are subject of your scrutiny have a long history. The Civil Rights Commission issued on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989 the *Report on Politically Motivated Discrimination and Persecution*<sup>1</sup>, a study that provided a detailed analysis of the persecution of independence and other political leaders by the Police, the US military forces and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The report stated that from the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American agencies (namely the FBI, the US Army and the US Navy) conducted intelligence activities in Puerto Rico. Those included a wide range of illegal and questionable actions. The Civil Rights Commission documented a systematic and continuous surveillance of legitimate activities of citizens, organizations, labor unions, political parties and governmental functions. The report cites multiples documents to support the allegation that the FBI regularly used paid informers in its data gathering activities (pg. 216). For example, the report identified a 1936 memo of the surveillance of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and its leader, Pedro Albizu-Campos, as well as a 1942 FBI report on the General Confederation of Workers (pg. 242-243).

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<sup>1</sup> Informe Discrimen y persecucion por rezones politicas: la practica gubernamental de mantener listas, ficheros y expedients de ciudadanos por razon de su ideologia politica. 1989-CDC-028.

Political activities in Puerto Rico were among the first subjects of the FBI Cointelpro Program. As early as November 1960, then FBI Director, Edgar J. Hoover elaborated the strategy to be employed in Puerto Rico. In a letter to the FBI San Juan Office, Hoover gave specific instructions to infiltrate informants into organizations advocating for independence, to raise controversial issues in the meetings, to encourage the criticism of the leadership, and to engage in any activity that would weaken those organizations (pg. 249). The San Juan office also received very clear orders to undermine the emotional stability of the members of those organizations, to foster instability and discord, and to encourage conflict among groups by leaking anonymous letters, planting articles in news media, and threatening news organization with revocation of their licenses, among other tactics.

Like the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement, pro independence leaders were victims of defamation and moral attacks. The families of those leaders also shared the pain and anguish of the persecution and the attempts on their lives. In addition, the San Juan office received instructions to abort efforts to establish collaborations between independence organizations and the create alliances between Puerto Rican organizations and progressive movements in the United States, including African American organizations (pg. 250-252). And furthermore, the San Juan and New York offices joined forces to monitor the solidarity between Puerto Ricans on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another report issued by the Civil Rights Commission in 1995 addressed the interception of telephone conversations by the Puerto Rico Telephone Company<sup>2</sup> (then a publicly-owned enterprise), and provided additional evidence of FBI's politically motivated interventions. It documented that employees frequently intercepted telephones at the request of the FBI. When questioned about that practice, the then President of the PRTC argued that the FBI supervised and controlled those employees and thus, it guaranteed the compliance with the law (pg. 22).

The events that resulted in the murder of independence leader, Filiberto Ojeda-Rios on September 23, 2005, and the use of force against members of the press on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006 demand a thorough investigation, and thus we welcome this initiative. The Civil Rights Commission respectfully recommends that the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives investigates the actions of the FBI in Puerto Rico. The Commission also supports the efforts of the Secretary of

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<sup>2</sup> Informe especial sobre alegaciones de que la Telefonica de Puerto Rico confecciona "carpetas" a funcionarios e intercepta llamadas por razones politicas. 3 de junio de 1995.

Justice, Honorable Roberto J. Sanchez Ramos, to obtain the testimony of the FBI officials that participated on those interventions.

The Civil Rights Commission of Puerto Rico reaffirms its commitment to hold public hearings on the use of excessive force against members of the press on February 10th, and to investigate aspects of the events that surround the death of Mr. Ojeda-Rios. We will gladly share our findings with your office, and extend you and your colleagues an invitation to participate as Observers during any of our proceedings. We are also committed to support effort by public and non governmental entities to bring this case to national, federal and international bodies.

We urge you, Honorable Members of the House of Representatives, to add your voices to the demand of the People of Puerto Rico to investigate these dreadful events, ascertain responsibilities, and bring justice to our people. The best guarantee of Democracy is government accountability. That is why, government actions need to be open to public scrutiny. I know we all share an unwavering commitment to protect every citizen's human rights, particularly during these troubled times. Now is the time to act. History will be on our side.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Palmira N. Rios  
President

Copy	Hon. Charles Rangel
	Hon. Nydia Velazquez
	Hon. Luis Gutierrez
	Hon. Jose Serrano
	Hon. Barbara Lee
	Hon. Luis Fortuno
	Lic. Eduardo Bhatia
	Commissioners